

**]RUNNING HEADS:**

**]VERSO: ADOM PHILOGENE HERON**

**]RECTO: WHEN 'BLOOD SPEAKS' [**

**]t1[When 'blood speaks': naming the father and the mystics of kinship in Dominica, Eastern Caribbean**

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]abs[This article explores the mystical implication of fathers in reproduction in Dominica, Eastern Caribbean. It traces naming acts that assign paternity at various points in the filial life course, each attempting to disambiguate paternity. Confronting a recurring anthropological problematic – the problem of paternity (paternity's inherent putativity) – the article argues that Dominicans contest uncertain physical fatherhood through the proverb 'blood speaks'. The article elaborates how relatedness reveals itself in the subtle bodies of kin at three moments: through a local version of the *couvade* ('sympathetic pregnancy'); in elders' post-partum ritual scrutiny of children's bodies for familial resemblances; and during serendipitous encounters in later life. The article highlights how physical fatherhood is disclosed in fathers' and children's symptoms, appearances, and sensations, revealing their kinship in transpersonal terms. Therefore, blood 'speaks' to counter broad-brushed narratives of Caribbean fatherly absence by revealing the physical and spiritual significance of

fatherhood. Herein, the article revives classic anthropological debates on legitimacy, the couvade, and Caribbean kinship, whilst contributing to contemporary theorizations of blood and naming.

## **Introduction. Anthropology and the problem of paternity**

*Mater semper certa est.* [The mother is always certain.]

Principle of Roman law (Duggan 2014)

Maternity is proved by the senses whereas paternity is a surmise based on a deduction and a premise.

Freud (1939: 180)

Mama's baby, papa's maybe ...

Hortense J Spillers (1987)

The notion that maternity is observable and thus knowable, whilst paternity is a putative claim, presents a puzzle that predates modern anthropology. Yet, the puzzle has recurred, from Bachofen (1992) and Morgan's (1907 [1877]) shift from 'mother right' to 'father right'; to Malinowski's grapple with Trobrianders' supposed 'ignorance of physical fatherhood' (1916; 1927); to Barnes's 'genitors' and 'paters' (1973); and Leach (1966), Spiro (1968), then, later, Delaney's (1986) 'virgin birth' debates; and, finally, to Strathern's concept of the parent (2011: 255). An epistemological and ontological question, it may be simplified as such: if physical maternity can be readily observed and thus ostensibly known, then to whom and how is fathering to be ascribed in a given society, if at all?

[p1[In this article I address the *problem of paternity* from the ethnographic perspective of the Caribbean. I examine how, in the Eastern Caribbean island of Dominica, paternity is assigned and reassigned through the naming of fathers. These ‘speech acts’ demonstrate the performative power of words (Austin 1962), as Dominicans speak social reality into being by declaring and contesting paternity at various moments in the reproductive life course. My claim (by taking seriously my interlocutors) is that not only is maternity knowable because of its observability, but fatherhood, too, can be *felt* and thus known (rather than simply surmised). ‘Who feels it, knows it’, as the Anglophone Antillean proverb goes. But, rather than focus on most Dominican children, whose fathers have been undisputedly named, I analyse instances where ‘name doh call’ (paternity is unassigned) or where a man ‘get a false child’ (paternity is misassigned). My interest here is in paternal ambiguity, or, more specifically, why, how, and when this ambiguity becomes a problem. Such cases of contested paternity, though statistically infrequent – approximately 1 in 10 children – are extensively remarked upon for they reveal the potentially tenuous quality of paternal ascription, and therein demand a social solution.

[p1[My argument centres on one folk solution to the Caribbean problem of paternity, conveyed in the popular Dominican aphorism ‘blood speaks’, meaning, ‘blood’ – as both bodily substance and metonym for physical kinship – is said to have a mystical means of disclosing consanguinity between unknown relatives. Blood’s speech reveals how biological paternity is also ‘evidenced by the senses’: that is, if one knows how to discern it. Using a life-course approach, I elaborate examples of blood’s diction at three moments: (1) during pregnancy via a local form of the *couvade* (male ‘sympathetic pregnancy’); (2) during what informants called the ‘sit and watch’, where elders ritually scrutinize the body of the infant for kin resemblances; and (3) during mystical encounters between kin ‘later down in life’ (Fig. 1).

**INSERT FIGURE 1 NEAR HERE**

At each moment, corporeal clues are interpreted to confirm or deny paternity, subtly ‘speaking’ against or concurring with the mother’s original declaration. Here I sketch a general route through the reproductive relationships of Dominican men to their offspring – from conception via pregnancy to infancy, and into adulthood – piecing together a diachronic picture of physical fatherhood. This research was conducted across 17 months (October 2012-March 2014) in Dominica, an agrarian island of approximately 71,000 people, sandwiched between Martinique (south) and Guadeloupe (north) in the Lesser Antilles. Driving my arguments are the narratives of various interlocutors gathered during interviews, informal conversations, and observant participation in village life along Dominica’s west coast and northeastern Kalinago (indigenous) territory.

In what follows, I attend to the transpersonal spiritual intimacy of the paternal relations. This is particularly significant (a) in a region where personhood is typically understood in individuated terms (Mintz 1965; Wardle 2004), and (b) where fathers have been portrayed as marginal, missing, or emotionally distant figures from whom ‘children derive practically nothing that is of importance’ (R.T. Smith 1956: 147; see also Blackwood 2005). Furthermore, the spiritual-bodily connections discussed here urge us to reflect seriously on what Jamaican anthropologist Barry Chevannes called ‘the very basic drive on the part of the male to confirm his part in the life-creating act’ (2006: 188). My goal is to extend the conversation on Afro-Caribbean male reproduction beyond thin analyses of sexual virility as reputation-enhancer (Wilson 1973). Therefore, when I read Edith Clarke’s conclusion from Jamaica that ‘proof of a man’s maleness is the impregnation of a woman’ (1999 [1957]: 96), I am compelled to ask: how does conception become so meaningful for Caribbean masculinity? What follows is an answer from Dominica: a detailed formulation of how physical father-child relatedness acquires meaning at certain moments, whilst being obviated or concealed at others. Herein, the article revives classical anthropological debates on physiological parenthood

(paternity, ‘legitimacy’, and *couvade*) and Caribbean kinship (descent and the ‘dual marriage system’), whilst also contributing to contemporary discussions of blood (Carsten 2013*a*), truth (Carsten 2013*b*), and naming (vom Bruck & Bodenhorn 2006). But first some remarks on the significance of the father’s name, its relation to ‘blood’, and a sketch of Dominican reproductive concepts.

### **On paternal naming and blood**

Anthropology has a long-standing interest in names as classificatory symbols (connoting kinship, alliance, and enmity: e.g. Bramwell 2016; Lévi-Strauss 1966; Morgan 1907 [1877]) and naming as a process of identification and constitution (of subjectivities, persons, and bodies: Das & Copeman 2015; Geertz 1973: 369; vom Bruck 2006). For some, recent anthropological attention has turned to names as holders of personal truths, which ‘real’ proper names may disclose (Pina-Cabral 2010) or their concealment can refuse (Steinberg 2015). In the Caribbean, ethnographers have remarked upon a regional penchant for naming and nicknaming as a mode of ‘symbolic individuation’ (personal distinction), and the appropriation of famous monikers to convey heroic personae (Burton 1999; Manning 1974). However, rather than focus on nicknames or proper nouns, here I am interested in the assignment of surnames and how the ‘naming’ (public identification) of fathers attempts to announce and fix particular truths.

For Caribbean people, the father’s name bears social and personal significance. Whilst anthropologists like Malinowski (1916; 1927) and Mead advanced the universal principle of ‘legitimacy’ – which the latter defined as the condition where ‘women must have husbands, so that children have fathers ... [and thus] a stable place in the world’ (Mead & Heyman 1965: 45) – in the Caribbean, people place greater emphasis on children ‘carrying’ their father’s name. Antigua

novelist Jamaica Kincaid presents the case most emphatically in her paternal memoir, *Mr Potter*, in which she writes:

[ex/[I hold in my hand a document that certifies the date of my own birth ... the name given to me ... the name of my mother ... and there is an empty space with a line drawn through it where the name of my father, Roderick Nathaniel Potter, ought to be (2002: 161).]/ex[

]p[For Kincaid, the absence of her father from her birth certificate represents an existential unmooring which she returns to throughout the book (Rahim 2011). This missing name signifies a deep personal void. Much as is the case for Kincaid, I suggest that the name of the father constitutes an important symbolic holder for Caribbean people. It functions to position individual beings in the world and signify their origins.

]p1[In the Antilles, paternal naming stands in place of a matrimonial imperative. With a history of being denied marriage during enslavement (Green 2007), the emancipated labouring classes (peasants, labourers, and maroons) developed patterns of ‘visiting’ unions (Olwig 1981), ‘conjugal shifting’ (throughout the life course: Rodman 1971), and later-life marriage which eventually spread across the class spectrum (R.T. Smith 1987). It is unsurprising, then, that extra-marital child-rearing is the norm throughout the region and legal ‘illegitimacy’ rarely provokes disapproval (Manyoni 1971). M.G. Smith’s observation of Carriacou might be applied across the region: notably, ‘[Caribbean] culture regards all children acknowledged by their fathers as socially legitimate’ (1962: 93). Social legitimation occurs not through marriage, but through the giving and begetting of a patronym. Moreover, the historical stratification of the Anglophone Caribbean led to the emergence of what R.T. Smith (1982; 1987) has called a ‘dual marriage system’, involving, on the one hand, ‘church marriage’ between class equals aligned to the ‘status system’ of planter elites and the post-

emancipation middle classes, and, on the other, ‘non-legal unions’ (‘concubinage’) belonging to the pragmatic ‘kinship system’ of the masses. As alluded to, this latter kinship system now cross-cuts the entire society, particularly where it has, since enslavement, produced ‘outside’ children born of elite or middle-class married fathers and working-class mothers (R.T. Smith 1982: 121-5). Based on my research in Dominica and reading of the region’s kinship literature, I contend that when children are born of such ‘outside’ relations, it is the naming of fathers that mediates the two systems. That is, the patronym informs how children born of *the pragmatic kinship system* are positioned in relation to the *hierarchical status system*. Much as Bodenhorn and vom Bruck (2006: 2) suggest, across various contexts names are understood to have the power to fix identities. A father’s name therefore not only gives a Dominican child a place to be in the world, it may also designate that place in class and status terms.

lp1[In the colonial Antilles, elite European and Creole patriarchs bequeathed property and status to descendants who inherited their respectable ‘family names’. As Blake noted of Jamaican fathers in the late 1950s/early 1960s, ‘[Their] ideal self-image appears to be that of a responsible patriarch whose “name” and patrimony descend down through the generations’ (1961: 192). However, surnames do not just carry inheritance of status and wealth, but folk recognition of a father’s memory and persona too – the name *he made*: For example, we may consider the name of a charismatic politician or estate owner; or equally, among the labouring classes, a father might have made his name as a ‘man-of-words’ (e.g. a calypsonian: Abrahams 1983; or storyteller: Chamoiseau 1999) or acts (e.g. as a great spearfisher, notorious criminal, or *Bèlè* dancer<sup>1</sup>), each enabling him to convey traces of his legacy to his child via his name. Indeed, the importance of such legacies continues to be expressed today. Take Chuckey, a respected ‘ghetto boy’, aged 25, from a suburban west coast village where I conducted fieldwork. When asked about the meaning of fatherhood, he emphasized the significance of ‘spreading his seed’ (having multiple children). ‘Your name must go on. Must go on. It must!’, he

insisted. ‘... I doh bound to be a rich man for my name to stay on this earth you know, dog!’, Chuckey added, emphasizing the potential immortality of a reputation. Hence, paternal names are endowed with power, not only as social ‘legitimizers’, but also as vectors of one’s legacy, both material and symbolic.

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[In bringing the importance of the patronym to bear on discussions of blood and physical parenthood, Edith Clarke’s theory of descent in *My Mother Who Fathered Me* is illuminative (1999 [1957]). Using the example of ‘family land’ (indivisible usufruct property bequeathed by a single ancestor), Clarke identified a bilateral descent system whereby maternal inheritance/kinship was carried ‘through the blood’, whilst fathers bequeathed property ‘by name’ (1999 [1957]: 38). Her conclusions stand up well in contemporary Dominica, going some way to explain the politicized issue of paternal naming (as detailed below), for it can have profound material consequences in a context of scarcity – informing who may lay claim to fatherly support and familial property. However, I want to nuance Clarke’s bifurcation of descent in one important way: by suggesting that the father’s name does not simply mirror the mother’s blood. Rather, paternal naming *indexes* ‘father blood’; it functions to communicate paternal consanguinity too. And so, when a father’s name is uncertain, blood may be invited to ‘speak’.

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[‘But, what kind of thing is blood?’ (Carsten 2013a: 2). In Carsten’s cross-cultural theorization of blood, it is framed as something ubiquitous yet multivalent and shifting; whether an everyday bodily substance, a metaphor, or a commodity (Carsten 2011; 2013a). Likewise, in her book *One blood* (1993), Sobo posits blood as the unifying element of the Jamaican social body, fluidly connecting local concepts of kinship, health, hygiene, gender, sorcery, subjectivity, and nation. Yet my concern is considerably narrower than these: I focus on blood as a bodily substance and a metonym for physical kinship that is invested with agentive, truth-telling potential. Hence, this article can be read along a comparative grain with recent studies that also analyse blood’s enunciative and

truth-disclosing capacities (e.g. in the context of sexuality declarations among gay blood donors: Strong 2009; the ‘true’ moral sacrifice of Indian political ascetics who have portraits of martyrs publicly penned in their blood: Copeman 2013; Copeman & Street 2014; or the medieval myths that took Christ’s bleeding en route to Calvary as ‘proof’ that God was incarnate in Jesus: Bildhauer 2013). But before discussing how blood ‘speaks’ paternity, it is imperative to first sketch Dominican understandings of the reproductive process.

### Everyday reproductive concepts

Dominican reproductive concepts are a synergy of biomedical, biblical, Amerindian, and Afro-Creole elements, held together through a set of Creole idioms.<sup>2</sup> Although class, gender, age, rural/urban/overseas residence, religion, and education inform variations in their usage, one can sketch a folk model of common reproductive concepts that is intelligible to most Dominicans.

Papa Jah (God) orchestrates the ‘act of creation’ that brings children into the lived world. On this most agree. Ras Julie, a father in his early sixties attested: ‘Child must come out from Jah, to go through us [men], to go through her [woman]. Nobody cannot do dat except De Most High. De Most High dat bring you dere. It’s he dat know: a lickle seed germinating and bring a big tree’. Men and women often deploy a seed metaphor for conception. Jah provides the seed, which the physical father sows. The mother represents the fertile earth that ‘germinate de child’. Hence, Dominicans say that a mother ‘bear her pain’ and ‘make child’ (carries; births). Mothers contribute the physical matter of the child and take on the ‘burden’ of becoming a vessel for the ‘miracle’ of reproduction. By contrast, during conception men transmit the spirit of the child through their ‘water’ or ‘soul water’ (semen), providing the biogenetic blueprint for foetal development.<sup>3</sup> In short, mothers ‘bear’ and ‘make’ children, whilst fathers ‘put them there’.

Disagreement lies not in the meaning of the idioms, but in the relative stress men and women place on them concerning their reproductive contributions. Conception, that which for mothers is a fleeting entry into a nine-month pregnancy, is for fathers the foundation of their reproductive experience. For each parent, procreation creates a dyadic relation to the child. As mentioned, physical kinship is bilateral, understood in 'blood'-based terms: along maternal and paternal lineages (the latter via 'name'). Thus, Caribbean parents typically say 'my child' and rarely 'our child' – as if unmediated by the other parent (conjugal bonds being less powerful than consanguineal ones). For mothers, the labour of bringing an infant into the world affords her primary rights and responsibilities for 'her child'. The society recognizes this; therefore the mother possesses the prerogative to 'name' the father.

For the man, the minutiae of conception are key. Biomedical concepts, particularly the activity of gametes (egg and sperm), are invested with ideas about the mystical workings of 'blood' and 'spirit'. Conception creates an 'extension' of the man's being in the gestating foetus: 'When you let go dat lickle drop of water [seminal fluid], that is *you!*', expressed Ras Julie, offering a liquid equivalent to the British adage of the 'chip off the old block': the child as part of the paternal self, broken from its origin. (In fact, to 'break' is a local synonym of ejaculation.) Most striking was the extent to which the ostensibly slight male reproductive role was said to generate a deep physical and spiritual relation to the child. Such interpretations are possible because of how men understand their reproductive roles. 'Naturally your sperm is your blood, eh', Valmond, an elder Kalinago<sup>4</sup> father described, adding that 'blood and spirit are one'. Positioning these claims alongside the Dominican proverb that 'family carries in the blood', a semiotic continuity between semen, blood, spirit, and family becomes apparent. Therefore, when a man 'breaks', his semen/'seed'/'soul water' transmits part of his 'spirit' and 'blood' to his offspring, who become kin.

]p1[In the Antilles, not only is blood a metonym for relatedness (as in Euro-American kinship: Schneider 1972), it also possesses agentic potential. In Dominica, ‘blood speaks’ – it ‘corresponds’, as Valmond once phrased it – through the shared ‘ways’ (personality traits), resemblances, and mystical affects felt by kin who are brought into proximity. Conception sets in motion what is considered to be a natural and transcendental sympathy between kin who ‘carry’ a continuous spirit.<sup>5</sup> This is not to ignore mothers’ contributions to the ‘ways’ and form of the child. Both men and women noted the contribution of maternal blood to the forming foetus. In fact, some even described an adversarial meeting of mother’s and father’s ‘blood’ at the moment of conception. Star explained, ‘When de sperm leave you, if your genes stronger dan de woman, de child will be everyfing about *you!* If de woman genes stronger ...de child will be everyfing about *her!*’ Here, mother’s and father’s ‘blood’ vie for dominance to determine the personality of the child (reworking Mendel’s theory of dominant-recessive alleles in biomedical reproduction). Interestingly, the tensions that often characterize Caribbean parental relations are writ small in this interpretation of the microscopic battle of gametes.

]p1[Nonetheless, although women’s biogenetic contribution to conception is acknowledged, men’s contribution is greater elaborated by mothers and fathers. This is perhaps, as noted, because the mother’s physical participation in pregnancy is taken as evident, whereas the father’s bodily inclusion and naming is mediated by evidence of a spiritual connection and thus more open to interpretation. Therefore, men often reified the activity of blood, semen, and gametes as they staked a claim in reproduction. Women, by contrast, emphasized the burden, sacrifice, and pain of pregnancy and birth, which afford them the right to ‘call name’.

## **]ha[A mother's prerogative: 'name call' and the 'birth paper'**

]epi/[Children are named after their fathers. A woman's children's last names provide an oral history of her procreative exploits. Names also bind fathers to children, publicly announcing that relationships exist and reminding men of their obligations.]/epi[

]episou[(Sobo 1993: 147)

]p[Caribbean mothers 'name' fathers; fathers 'claim' (or deny) children. 'Name call' is paternity's public declaration. This naming act occurs when a pregnancy is discovered (or any time thereafter) and is the primary right of a mother. She speaks social reality into being through the 'performative utterance' (Austin 1962: 6) of telling the father, her family, and neighbours that she is pregnant 'for' a particular man. If no man is named, the news may proliferate through one's community and *pawol* ('talk') designates paternity. Where uncertainty exists (e.g. if the mother was rumoured to have several lovers), naming serves to remove ambiguity by fixing a single putative father. Occasionally, fathers protest that they have been given a 'false child', cuckolded by a 'tricksy' (ex-)lover attempting to 'tie' them financially. In Dominica, a relatively low-income, predominantly agrarian island where fathering centres on the imperative to provide materially, this phenomenon of the 'false child' is a persistent anxiety for men who wish to pass on their name, yet not to another man's child. Owing to similar concerns, the 'false child' concept has a region-wide ubiquity, being variably termed a 'ready-made' or 'jacket' throughout the Anglophone islands, metaphorical references to a suit jacket tailored for someone else or a straitjacket men are forced into (Cooper 2010; King 2011). The concept provokes neighbourhood rumour and humour for it suggests clandestine female sexual transgressions, cunning evasion of the patriarchal double standards that govern conjugal sexuality (women home, men free to roam; Wilson 1969: 71).

Nonetheless, named fathers approach their suspicions tentatively. ‘Why don’t you leave it open for her to more judge whose it is really!?’ reasoned a friend, Mr Greggs, echoing the sentiments of silently doubting dads. After all, as any Dominican man will admit and female elders are quick to remind, ‘*si ou pa passay la, nom pa ka kiya*’ (‘if you did not pass there, your name couldn’t call’). Hence, most men ‘accept’ paternity in the knowledge that the child could be ‘theirs’ once their ‘name call’. Whilst a man’s acceptance of paternity activates expectations, it never guarantees provision. Lingering doubts, sometimes based on a desire not to financially commit to fathering or a conjugal union, inform paternal indifference. Such fathers rarely visit a ‘child-mother’s’<sup>6</sup> home to ‘check’ their child (express recognition of them and bring provision: money, schoolbooks, clothes, or gifts). But equally, some men turn a blind eye to implausible paternity ‘out of love’ for a woman or ‘his’ child.<sup>7</sup> These men risk the shame of the ‘true’ father boastfully exposing female infidelity or the child physically ‘favouring’ (resembling) another man. Yet in many cases, a man’s naming as the father, along with the paternal bonding that likely follows, mutes any contrary evidence. The man’s paternity is, for that moment at least, a public truth.

When mothers ‘call name’, they are aware of many factors. Although their misassignment may be comical for observers, their choice is informed by sincere concerns. Whether the man is reliable, financially forthcoming, and likely to ‘claim’ the child; is of reputable ‘family name’ and class standing; is married to someone else; or is ‘de one she really love’, each informs her decision (alongside the plausibility of the call: nine months having elapsed since a sexual encounter). Naming is therefore a risky business, as is calling no name. And again, the double standard of conjugal sexuality rears its Janus face, for the mother who names no father may be denigrated by neighbourhood foes as *Mamma waat/mamma wadeen*<sup>8</sup> (mother rat/guinea pig), suggesting the irresponsibility of a mother with innumerable children and ‘child-fathers’. Similarly, incorrectly

naming a father, then later going back on one's declaration, is potentially embarrassing in the eyes of onlookers. To 'keep face', mothers aim to make a binding and correct call. However, some mothers reject pressures to name at all, electing to give the child their own father's name. Such defiance, usually due to soured relations or genuine uncertainty, declares a child as the mother's sole responsibility (albeit potentially inscribing a future 'father wound' on the child, as with Kincaid above, or bringing some moral condemnation from her church: Wardle 2000:49). Here the mother trades off potential embarrassment and her child's paternal longing against the self-depreciation of having to 'beg' a father to provide for his child and consequently becoming subject to his authority. In many mothers' estimation, it is better for a child to appear to have no father than a 'wotless' (worthless), indifferent, or domineering one.

lp1[This brings me to the 'birth paper', where the new-born is 'register on de fada name'. Here paternity is declared before the state and the patronym is formally enshrined. If the father is married to the mother, the husband's name is written by default, but in most cases both parents must co-register the birth at the registry office. Like most legal documentation, the birth paper possesses symbolic potency that can be activated when required. For working-class Dominicans who largely operate within a *world of words*, legal artefacts from the *world of letters* have ritual force. Therefore, the threat of bringing disputed paternity before the state represents a final recourse. 'I'll sen' court paper for you!' is a regularly wielded though rarely executed threat, particularly by a mother whose 'child-father' is not 'maintaining' his child(ren). On the occasion where she does bring him to child maintenance court, the presence of his name on the birth paper makes her likely to gain a maintenance order.

]p1[In sum, ‘name call’ and the ‘birth paper’ have great performative power: intending to fix paternity socially and legally; to deal unequivocally with the problem of ambiguous/disputed paternity. However, when ‘blood speaks’ to contest the initial assignment, the problem is reopened.

### ]ha[**Moment 1. ‘De symptom’: a contemporary Caribbean couvade**

]p[In his book *The Barbadian male: sexual attitudes and practice* (1987), Dann proffered a damning portrait of ‘inadequately socialized’, ‘machismo’-driven, and sexually ‘irresponsible’ Bajan males. Yet so taken was the author by this sense of fecklessness that in one of his interviews something remarkable eluded him. A 30-year-old printer’s assistant described his memories of almost becoming a father:

]ex/[There is this girl from St Vincent. I went down there for a weekend ... and I was having a wonderful time. I know when I came back here I found all of a sudden I was getting sleepy about 9 o’clock. Normally that would not be, getting *sleepy*, weak and tired. So I say ‘well look that girl get pregnant’. I say, ‘I doubt it’ ... until about two years after I went down there and the girl tell me ‘yes’, she had a little boy. And this fellow say *it* is his, and he making noise for *it*. So I say ‘well, he making noise for *it*, let he keep *it*’ (Dann 1987: 97).]ex[

]p[Curiously, these symptoms – tiredness, weakness, sleepiness, which lead the man to suspect a woman was pregnant ‘for him’ – were ignored by the author, deemed analytically extraneous to the point he was making about paternal indifference (instead, Dann problematised his use of the neuter pronoun to describe the infant). This is no surprise. Scholarship on Caribbean fathering has rarely been attentive to its experiential affects. To my knowledge, Dann’s is the only scholarly account of

the Afro-Caribbean couvade<sup>9</sup> or ‘sympathetic pregnancy’ (Amerindian cases notwithstanding, e.g. Honduran Garifuna [Munroe, Munroe & Whiting. 1973] or Dominican ‘Carib’ examples [Taylor 1950]). Nonetheless, colleagues’ anecdotes from Jamaica, Grenada, Trinidad, and Belize suggest that the couvade is a trans-Caribbean phenomenon. Therefore, I suggest the Dominican couvade, ‘de symptom’, ‘de effec’, *la dormi* (tiredness), as it is variably termed, discloses a neglected phenomenology of paternity and pregnancy. The couvade’s cues offer evidence of blood’s utterance and quiet confirmation of paternity. Such utterances cannot speak this felt reality into a public one; the mother retains the prerogative to ‘call name’. Nonetheless, the father’s attitude (of embrace or rejection) towards the child may be informed by his experience of ‘de symptom’, or lack thereof.

]p1[Early on in fieldwork I held a ‘reasoning’ (the Rastafarian equivalent of a Platonic meditation) with Star (a 38-year-old father of seven) and his friend Indica (father of one). I asked them how children come into the world. Here I first learned about ‘de symptom’,

[TYPESETTER: FOLLOW, e.g. O’NEILL IN JRAI 24(4) FOR CORRECT DIALOGUE LAYOUT – NO EXTRA SPACE BETWEEN SPEAKERS’ TURNS; TURNOVERS ON FURTHER INDENT[

]exdia/[

*Indica*: You’ll have sex wiv a woman. You check your vibes, you know, she pregnant.

*Star*: Yeh, because you *feel dat!*

*Me*: You can tell?

*Sylvester*: ... not just ‘you can tell’, *you feel!* You feel dat my brudda! ... You must ’ave toothache, you doh have no bad teeth and your teeth hurting you. It ’ave all your joints [aching]. Man does get sick. Man does vomit for the whole nine-month. Things does

jus' happen! ... So, it have dem syptoms dere and dose signs dere. Fada [God] make it known to man ...

]exdia[

]p[ 'De symptom' was described as the manifestation of gestation on the body of men. Those who report it complain of any combination of aching joints, lethargy, toothache, sickness, and abdominal pain – all evidence that a woman is pregnant 'for them'. I was even told of a man from Dominica's southeast who fainted each time his child-mother had become pregnant with their three children. By the last occasion, he was so familiar with the experience that after coming back to consciousness he phoned her in neighbouring Gwad'loup (where she resides) to tell her she was carrying his child. People typically discussed this symptomatology in tandem with a mother's body and mood changes, her cravings and repulsions brought about by pregnancy. Indeed, when my wife, who was pregnant at the time, recently returned with me to Dominica, her request for particular foods were interpreted by our family and friends as the child agentively dictating its tastes through her body, much as an aunt described her cravings for smoked herring, green banana, and cocoa tea when pregnant with her daughter as 'the child demanding its thing'.

]p1[There is no consensus on the duration of the couvade: some say it occurs in the first one to five months, whilst others, like a Kalinago elder I interviewed, stated: 'I used to be sick-self, man. Just sick!' for the entire nine months. Therefore, 'In different man, different vibes', Star concluded on the matter, suggesting no uniformity of couvade experience. In fact, of all the thirty-eight men I spoke to on the subject, only eight had actually felt 'de symptom'<sup>10</sup> themselves. Nonetheless, all men and women I spoke to knew someone who claimed they had.

]p1[One afternoon, Joel, a handyman and father of one who had experienced 'de symptom', ethnologically explained its Caribbean ubiquity. The TV was playing American chat show *Maury*,

which by chance featured an African-American man awaiting DNA paternity test results for a child he claimed was not his. ‘You are not the father!’, read Maury as the crowd erupted and the man leapt up, shouting, ‘I told you! I told you!’ To this Joel commented:

]ex/[All dose show dat coming dere, mister and dem don’t know about dat, because he should know from since a woman pregnant for him, he must get a symptom. He doh know maybe for da whole week he sleepin’ in bed he doh feelin’ to go work, but he doh pick up [that it’s] de symptom. But we in de Caribbean, we know about dose ting dere, we hear our parents, our grandparents talk about dose ting. ]/ex[

]p[Many like Joel cited ‘de symptom’ as something widely recognizable from elders’ discussions about village affairs. Whilst there was often local disagreement about its causes, there was a general consensus that such inheritances underlined distinctions between a Caribbean subtle bodily awareness and a Northern Atlantic corporeal ignorance. The former was indicated by ‘de symptom’s’ ubiquity, reflected in male peer group and workplace banter, for example, as Indica and Star explained:

]exdia/[

*Indica:* Man does do dat like a slang, if man does come and meet you sleeping: ‘You got a woman pregnant for you, man?!’ ...

*Star:* I is man [that] does make de bossman know my woman pregnant: ‘So if you see me sleeping doh feel no way’. Sometime de bossman ask you, ‘How much month she be?’ ...I’d tell him five months, he say, ‘Ok my boy, doh feel [no way] man, jus now dat [will] stop, man’. Because de man know de business.]/ex[

]p[Male workmates and peers often recognized pregnancy symptoms in one another's bodies, and related them to their own experiences. Asked what causes 'de symptom', many said it stems from the spiritual relationship between father and child; the result of the forming foetus drawing energy from the father, to whom it remains continually connected 'in de blood' throughout gestation and birth.

When I asked Valmond, he speculated:

]ex/[I think maybe your blood ... I'm checking it's something the woman take from you, have from you ... a, strength, or whatever. Just like [for] de woman [tiredness, 'morning sickness', etc.], dey say its child that's causing you to be so, you know. Is de child ... Dey jus' give you a different feeling.]/ex[

]p[Rastaman Mr Greggs answered the same query,

]ex/[I think it's the spirit because ... it's another being! And ... the creation of another life force. So, it affects *you*, you know. And then it takes a matter from you, when you are enjoined [sexually] with the woman ... to get that creation. So, I think it's a reflection, you know, the presence of that being forming in de woman, it sort of *tells itself on you*. So, you feel a way ...]/ex[

]p[Greggs and Valmond understood blood, seminal 'matter', and spirit/'life force' as inseparable from each other, and inalienable from the bodies that impart them. For Valmond, the mother takes 'a strength', some vitality from the father to make the child, who then draws this energy directly. In Greggs's description 'blood speaks' through 'de symptom', 'telling itself' on the father's body, which becomes a 'reflection', a sympathetic mirror, of the forming child. These interpretations operate in tandem with that of the child, orchestrating the mother's cravings/morning sickness, with both emphasizing the child's physiological demands on its parents. Yet here the father's physical

relationship is more evidently mediated by the spirit, whilst the mother's subtle relation to the child she bears is considered more physiologically immediate.

]p1[Both Valmond and Greggs are experienced elder fathers who recalled an era when naturalist bodily knowledge predominated. Hence they expressed sensitivity to the couvade's causes and effects. And, like many rural and working-class Dominicans, they privileged the folk knowledge they 'raise up with' over biomedicine, which they approached sceptically, as something new and foreign (a point underscored in Joel's distinction between the relative bodily ignorance of the American man who relied on a DNA test and the Dominican corporeal awareness of those who could sense 'de symptom').

]p1[A generation younger, Rastas Star and Indica had cultivated such sensitivity in tune with their naturalist spiritual beliefs. They connected each symptom in the father to its corresponding feature in the foetus, which cunningly pulls resemblances from the father. When the father gives in to *la dormi* (tiredness) and 'sleep catch him', this is when the spirit of the child appropriates his characteristics:

]exdia/[

*Star:* All how you want to sleep, de child dat inside de stomach want a nose or want a piece of a eyes ... It 'ave to put you to sleep ... De child maybe want to take de form of your nose for de child to look just like you.

*Indica:* Spiritual kind of a vibes.

*Star:* Spirit working, I telling you! De spirit have to leave you to go inside de child to take a shape dere ... a mystic thing you know! ... It want it foot to be all how your foot is.

And you see your child born and she walking just like how you walking? Yes boss! At de moment you were sleeping, dat time de spirit working boss!

]/exdia[

]p[Together they reconciled a common understanding of how the spirit of the child ‘works’ to draw out paternal traits. Such conversations confirmed the idiosyncratic nature of these mystical experiences. They afforded creative licence to express how ‘blood spoke’ to them in particular ways. So whilst the society regards ‘de symptom’ as something widespread, it is individually felt and each narrative is taken as uniquely valid.

]p1[However, although many affirmed the reality of ‘de symptom’, others (approximately one-third of those spoken to) completely refuted the explanations I was given, dismissing them as ‘mind over matter’. In several group discussions, the phenomenon caused quarrels between those invested in enchanted interpretations on the one hand, and rationalists, on the other’. I present mostly the enchanted here. This is not to reify or exoticize this perspective as some kind of radical ontological alterity (Harris & Robb 2012), but because of my interest in what the very possibility of ‘de symptom’ *does*: how it works to involve male bodily selves in reproduction; how it can tell fathers a child is truly ‘theirs’ (or not); and how it provides Dominican men with a meaningful spiritual and physical foundation upon which to build fatherhood.

]p1[My attention is thus drawn to the bodily mindfulness some named fathers exercised as they searched for the couvade’s corporeal clues. As Greggs highlighted:

]ex/[Some people will know if is their child and if is not their child because they know *their* feeling ... They definitely does know if that is true or false ... All dem tings you have to mark

dat. All of those things is a sign, you can easily know if it is your own. Then he is sure that the child is his, because he knows the effects.]/ex[

]p[Greggs was speaking here of experienced fathers who have felt paternity before, elaborating on how they read bodily ‘signs’ to determine their paternal status. These examples highlight the Caribbean couvade’s distinctiveness. Indeed, much as the phenomenon reveals ‘an intimate mysterious connection’ between father and child (Karsten 1931: 194; Malinowski 1927) which is found in contexts as disparate as India, Japan, or Sweden (Dawson 1929: 24; Lundell 1999), there is something peculiar about the Dominican case. The contemporary Dominican couvade features neither the ‘public ritual’ (Douglas 1999 [1975]: 173) practised by their Kalinago forebears (Taylor 1950; and other Amerindians: Rival 1998: 622; Rivière 1974) involving strict food taboos and behavioural prescriptions, nor the ‘private experience’ (Douglas 1999 [1975]) of fathers in metropolitan contexts like the United States (Reed 2005) who are left to independently fathom or ignore bodily symptoms in the absence of a public couvade script (as Joel noted). Rather, the Caribbean stands somewhere in-between (a reflection of its ambivalent experience of modernity: Trouillot 1992: 20-1), inheriting a sense of bodily enchantment from Kalinago and African ancestors (and arguably medieval Europeans too: Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 2011: 14-15), but without consensus on the matter and no definitive couvade pre/proscriptions. Rather, this Creole couvade is worked out ‘*vai ki vai*’ (kwéyol for improvised ‘bit by bit’) through dialogue with peers and elders, whilst drawing on various strands of folk reproductive knowledge, magical belief, and biomedicine. And the aim of all this, in a post-plantation Creole kinship system where legal matrimony does not regulate paternal naming and descent, is to signal a father’s spiritual and physical relationship to a child as evidence of his paternity. However, where couvade observations yield no clear confirmation and ambiguity persists, a ‘sit and watch’ may be in order.

## ][ha[**Moment 2. The ‘sit and watch’**

]p[The air was muggy that Friday in Magistrate Augustus’s courtroom, the sweltering atmosphere tempered only by the occasional caress of four electric fans, struggling to cool a heated dispute between a woman and her putative ‘child-father’. The man argued from the defendant’s dock that the infant for whom he had been summoned on a ‘maintenance order’ was not his. The mother, on the witness stand opposite, insisted that he was the father and consistently failed to fulfil his duties. The dispute seemed intractable, each party sparring back and forth, whilst I, the magistrate, clerk, and two police officers watched on.

]p1[The father eventually attempted to draw a line under the matter, insisting that he would withhold ‘maintenance’ until he could verify the child as ‘his own’. To do so he would bring the child ‘by his mother’, for her to determine once and for all if he was the father. By this point, the magistrate – who had allowed them to vent for long enough – seemed to lose patience. ‘Get the money and do a proper DNA, not a sit and watch!’ she snapped, signalling that only a medical DNA test might ‘take a child out on de fada name’ (i.e. remove him from the ‘birth paper’) against the mother’s word. Eventually, the man agreed (reluctantly) to pay 1,040 Eastern Caribbean dollars (£260) for a medical paternity test to settle the matter; before adding, ‘If he is not my own, I setting him free!’

]p1[This was the only case in my fourteen months of observing the Dominican family court where anyone agreed to do a medical DNA test. Whilst such tests were regularly mentioned by the magistrate, they were seldom undertaken. Beyond the prohibitive cost (EC\$1,040 is well over a month’s average wages), the main reason seemed to be that people invest greater trust in the tried-and-tested ‘sit and watch’, as the magistrate termed it. Barry, a middle-aged professional (who, interestingly, dismissed ‘de symptom’ as ‘mind over matter’), exemplified this faith: ‘See de

Americans and wherever dey come out with dat DNA ting, dat was dere already with ur grandparents! Dey were de one dat giving de DNA. And dey even better dan de machine now. Me dat telling you!’

]p1[‘Sit and watch’ is customary in cases where paternity is contested, misassigned, or undefined. It involves an elder female – a mother, granny, or auntie – having a child brought to her, inspecting the nuances of the child’s physical features (e.g. fingernail cuticles or bow legs), bodily techniques, or mannerisms, then declaring them to be kin, or not (Chevannes 2006). Upon confirmation, the performative statement ‘*za se zanfou nou*’ (‘that is our child’) declares the child’s kinship to the paternal family. Highlighting particular elders’ uncanny ability to discern physical kin, George, a father and quarry worker, noted, ‘It’s not a joke! When dem people tell you dat is dere child, you cannot tell dem no! Dey know! Dem people know deir people by fingernail, wii!’

]p1[This positioning, as seasoned mothers, aunts, and charismatic family organizers, commands a special authority to ‘speak’ on kinship. As paternal kin, they can mount a more audible and authoritative challenge to the mother’s assignment than a father can. This is informed by kin knowledge and memory that extends to recent ancestors. As George added:

]ex/[Dey were dere long before us so dey can say. Because dey see Tom, dey se Harry ... dey can tell you, ‘You’re walking just like Tom; you walking just like Harry’. ‘All your move is dat one’s own. So, dat is dat person child’, or ‘Dat person is our family’. Whether you like it or not, they will let you know! It is a fact!]/ex[

]p1[The force of elder female naming is generational and experiential. This secondary naming creates another public truth from the father’s side that either concurs with or contradicts that of the child-mother. In a sense, this is a moment when fathers are born, for fatherhood is most forcefully spoken into being, and ambiguity dispelled, when it is affirmed by paternal female kin who find consensus with the father or child-mother.

]p1[Like 'de symptom', the outcome of the 'sit and watch' informs a man's behaviour towards his purported child(ren). Where resemblances are lacking, this is taken as proof of a 'false child', particularly if he already suspected the child to be too light/dark in complexion or too lacking in familial traits to be 'his own'. In such cases, men were reported to suddenly opt out of their 'responsibilities': 'He never give me a pin, neither a pound of sugar, neither a tin of milk for dat child ... Noffing!', recalled Mary, an elder mother, about the man who denied paternity for her daughter following his mother's 'sit and watch'. Conversely, elder females can insist an absconding son, nephew, or grandson take up his responsibilities towards a child she observes to be his. George echoed this, noting: 'When dey tell you dat child is yours, don't give dem no two-back [backchat]. Jus' know, dat is your child!' The elder's dual positionality – first as woman and mother, thus aware of a son's fatherly shortcomings; and secondly as his kin, hence protective of his interests (to not be 'tied' to a 'false child') – promote a degree of balance in her paternal assessment (see Richman 2002 for a similar Haitian case). Additionally, where a child is determined as 'theirs' but the father still refuses to 'check' them, paternal grandmothers and aunts may develop relations with the child directly. Here the child may 'go by' (visit) the grandmother or aunt, enabling them to 'know their father side', irrespective of the father's attitude. Although grandmothers/aunts seldom overturn the naming of the father, their corroboration of the mother's 'name call' may produce a bilateral child-rearing alliance between paternal females and mother, enabling the child to 'know' (recognize, be recognized by, and develop relationships with) their father's kin.

]p1[In sum, the 'sit and watch' manifests blood's utterance through the reading of physical kinship in the body of the child. Here 'blood speaks' through resemblances vocalized by the watching elder. However, sometimes it is not until adulthood that blood speaks to reveal a father's identity. Here blood enunciates kinship in other ways.

### **]ha[Moment 3. Paternal encounters ‘later down in life’**

]p[Some interlocutors spent their childhoods not knowing who their fathers were, the latter being unnamed or misassigned throughout. In such instances, the ‘true’ father’s name was often a *public secret*:- that which is suspected, even tacitly known, by family, friends, or neighbours, but remains undeclared by those who matter (child-mother, magistrate, or elder). Since ‘true’ paternity had not been fixed by ‘the word’, this muted relation was unacknowledged. However, in some instances *pawol* (talk) circulated amongst community members who vocalized visible resemblances between the child and a man the mother allegedly had relations with, compelling the child to seek out the unnamed father ‘later down in life’. Here, adult children deviated from their mother’s naming, attempting to (re)assign paternity themselves, through contact with this man. Greggs shared the story of a youth whose mother had a relationship with a married man and named someone else as his father. Hearing ‘talk’, the youth confronted the ‘true father’:

]ex/[So naturally he would leave the fada de mother give him and go to de man he know who is his fada. Yeah de blood is speaking, de blood is speaking. And de man would agree really, ‘Boy, I had an affair wid your moda, and you really are my child’ and ‘Let’s go!’.]ex[

]ex/[The youth initiated a relation with his true father, challenging his mother’s naming. Blood’s utterance, through his neighbours, had compelled him to resolve his paternal puzzle and breach the doubt that had shrouded his paternal status. However, in instances like the following, where an adult child respected the naming right of the mother, the paternal revelation was left to a serendipitous sequence of events. In this case, blood spoke throughout the life course by mounting pressure on an elder father and mother to finally declare their adult son’s true paternity.

## **]ha[How Scratchie came to know his father**

]p[‘I grew up without a man figure in the home ... always a single-parent kind of a vibes’, Scratchie, my landlord and felon-turned-family man, told me one evening during a life-history interview.

Scratchie ‘raised up’ not knowing who his father was; his mother had never named one. Like Kincaid, his ‘birth paper’ was marked by a line through the box designating a patronym. He always longed to know this man, insisting once, ‘Dat is what I always wanted in my life!’ But, he respected his mother too much to ever interrogate her silence: ‘As I tell you it was never in my position to go and ask that question, you dig’. ‘Until that day, eh ...’, he added, alluding to the moment when his mother finally named his father, by which time he was 36 and had children of his own. Still, as we talked through each hint, clue, and revelation in his life-long paternal riddle, it became apparent that blood had been ‘speaking’ all along.

]p1[First, he told me of an older woman, Verdun, whose bar he frequented during his criminal years. One night, whilst ordering a ‘step-up’ (ginger wine and spiced rum cocktail), ‘she ask me who is my fada. I say I doh know. She tell me she going and tell me who is my fada! Black Joe dat is my fada! ... So I tell her now, “People tell me that already, but it is not so!”’ Though Scratchie denied it, Verdun insisted that his stout, bow-legged walk had given it away. But, despite undeniable similarities – Scratchie also shares Black Joe’s dark complexion – he adamantly rejected her claim. Yet it nagged at him for weeks, until, ‘I go up Gwad’loup now [where his mother lived], I question my moda. And she tell me doh ask her question! And honestly, I doh furder de question. I just leave dat as is’. Hence, blood audibly spoke during his twenties, only to be muted by filial piety.

]p1[Second, Scratchie mentioned one of Black Joe’s daughters, Connie, who shared their bow-legs and dark skin. Growing up in the same community, people regularly thought she and

Scratchie were siblings: ‘From since we are kids, we grow up calling each other broda and sista because everybody used to tek us for broda and sista ... From dere de blood really start to flow’. As we spoke, his narrative refused simple chronology, moving back and forth in time as each revelation cast light on past moments. It seemed Verdun’s claim had thrown new significance on his childhood relationship to Connie, informing his choice to narrate it in this order. Blood began to speak, as far as he could discern, after Verdun’s vocalization. Before Verdun, it was not his place to explicitly confirm it, even if, as he identified, blood had already begun to ‘flow’.

]p1[Third, there was a virtual introduction to Black Joe’s eldest daughter, Rita (who lives in the US Virgin Islands). The intervention of this senior sister led to Scratchie’s incorporation into their paternal lineage. He first met the sister on MSN Messenger (pre-Facebook or Skype). Connie sent Scratchie’s photograph to Rita, who showed it to their threeother sisters (each overseas). They all confirmed his physical resemblance to them. Rita subsequently contacted Scratchie, who purchased a webcam, so as ‘to know’ his sisters. And after just a few months of being virtually (re)united, Rita and their threesisters ‘came down’ to Dominica for Scratchie’s wedding. As he recalled,

]ex/[First day she come down, she staying by him [their father], she say, ‘daddy’ , she want me on deir surname. So daddy ask her, who she talking about? She tell daddy, ‘*garçon ou ni la ou papau na, ca se fwé nou!*’ De boy you doh take dere, dat is our broda!]/ex[

]p[Rita’s intervention initially shocked her father, but together she and her sisters pressured him to recognize their brother ‘in name’. Eventually, their father conceded. As Scratchie narrated:

]ex/[Now, dat is de time, my fada showed dem ... he and my moda had dere ting going on, you understand. And soon after, me and my mother leave and go Marie Galant [an island off Guadeloupe]. And then I come about. But my mother never come and tell him nuffing. So, dat jus’ stayed so.]/ex[

]p[Black Joe invited Scratchie's mother to his house (she, too, was 'on island' for the wedding). After some deliberation, the mother confirmed Black Joe as Scratchie's father. Some months later, Scratchie changed from his mother's to his father's surname at the registry office, thus declaring his paternity before the state (and parting with the name he had made locally for criminality).

]p1[In short, this sequence of events enabled Scratchie to 'know' his father yet remain respectful to his mother. By perceiving the blood that had begun '*flowing*' during childhood, as Connie's play brother, started '*speaking*' with Verdun's interjection, and become *enshrined* '*in name*' and *law* following Rita's intervention, this intricate chain of occurrences enabled all parties to 'keep face'. Furthermore, it offered Scratchie a sense of bilateral kinship continuity (on mother's and father's sides), while a new name symbolized transcendence from his chequered past and, at the same time, ensured amicable later-life relations between elder parents. Furthermore, it is crucial to note that the relationship between father and son was made possible only through the transnational familial networking of female kin, who mediated Scratchie's incorporation into his patrilineage. Finally, the serendipity of the narrative hinted at an enchanted subtext: that mystical forces had played their part in this kinship union, although this never became explicit. Nevertheless, others framed their narratives of paternal (re)unions in more mystical and phenomenological terms. This final story of an elder man and daughter's encounter with an 'outside' son presents exactly that.

### **]ha[An elder man, daughter, and son**

]p[During a reasoning with some elders in the northwestern fishing village of Colihaut (my late paternal grandfather's natal community, which I visited throughout fieldwork), a Kalinago man who was passing joined the conversation. We were debating whether 'de symptom' was real or 'mind over matter'. He entered that he does not need 'de symptom' to sense if a woman is pregnant 'for him'. When 'I let go my water [ejaculate], I can tell', he attested. Citing an extra-marital affair, he spoke of

sensing conception during intercourse. He instructed the woman to count down ten lunar cycles (280 days), upon which ‘you must bear dat child’. And according to him, she indeed birthed a boy. But despite him claiming the child – ‘I say, “that’s mine”’ – she nonetheless ‘gave de child to another person’, he told us, thus avoiding having a married man’s ‘outside child’. However, years later when he returned to the woman’s village with his daughter (by marriage), he tells us they had an uncanny encounter:

]ex/[While we were waiting for a transport [a bus] a young man came up the road ... we greet them as normal people would greet anybody, [then] they walked away. My daughter looked at me and she tell me, ‘Daddy, who is that young man, de stouter one dat pass dere?’ I say, ‘W’happen ...you have an eye for him, nuh!?’ She say, ‘No, not that. But daddy, as I see de young man my blood shiver inside of me’./ec[

]p[He encouraged her to interpret this visceral response, citing the interaction as verbatim:

]exdia/[

*Father:* What would you read in dat?

*Daughter:* I dunno why it happen’ to me

*Father:* Did you feel passionate towards him?

*Daughter:* No!

*Father:* Haven’t I told you about a son I supposed to have? Dat’s he! He have de same genes with you. He have de same DNA with you. That is why you feel that way with him!  
Because de blood corresponding.

]exdia/[

]p[Physical proximity with undisclosed relatives is can cause cardiovascular excitement, a sensation similar to, but upon interrogation distinguishable from, sexual arousal. (Dominicans discern such sensations to avoid incestual encounters, as do neighbouring Guadeloupeans, as a French-Antillean

colleague recently noted; Alex Bizet personal correspondence, June 2018) Much as Scratchie described blood ‘flowing’, here blood ‘shivered’, moved by an unspoken yet apparent familiarity. Thus, blood can ‘correspond’, it communes between the subtle bodies of kin (who share ‘de same DNA’). Or as another elder put it, ‘blood doesn’t lost’. On the contrary, many Dominicans believe that ‘blood’ enables relatives to find and ‘know’ their kin. Hence, the man reported that the boy had similar feeling,

]ex/[De young man asking his broad, ‘Who are dese people? Because every time my eyes fall on dese young lady’s eyes and de big gentleman, my blood shiver right inside of me’. De broda jus’ look at him and say, ‘Your moda didn’t give you to *your fada*. De gentleman is your fada, and de girl is your sister’. And de broda tell me later ... de young man tell him dat is de time he feel comfortable and nice ... he just feel comfortable and quiet. Everything in him dat was, you know, activated, it jus’ quiet down and he was good.]/ex[

]p[This moment of revelation brought existential resolution: ‘he just feel comfortable’. He resolved what is locally understood as the natural impulse to ‘know’ one’s ‘true’ kin; an impulse located in the agency of blood itself. Therefore, ‘blood speaks’ when ‘the word’ (i.e. paternal naming) has failed to incorporate a missing member into the paternal line and where paternal ambiguity is unresolved. As this case reveals, it sometimes takes a mystical later-life meeting for the sentient body to demand that the correct father is named and paternal kin are recognized.

## ]ha[Conclusion

]epiver/[

Who feels it knows it, Lord

I said I feel it, and I know it.]epiver/[]

The Wailers, 'Who feels it knows it' (1966)

[p[In Dominica, 'blood speaks' in various ways and at various moments to disclose kinship in the bodies of father and child. I opened by positing the 'problem of paternity' (paternity's inherent putativity) as an age-old anthropological puzzle and the 'name call' (paternity-assigning speech act) as the Caribbean act of 'legitimation' (ensuring a child has a father, in place of marriage). I elaborated a brief mapping of Dominican everyday reproductive understandings before discussing three speech junctures in the male reproductive life course; three moments when 'blood speaks' back to a mother's declaration in an attempt to open up and (re)position paternity. During each juncture – 'de symptom' in pregnancy, the 'sit and watch' in childhood, and uncanny encounters 'later down in life' – blood was perceived to 'speak' (or conspicuously fall silent) through the bodies of consanguines, offering physical clues that might reveal biogenetic kinship. Each of these momentary contestations has shown that social 'legitimacy' is not necessarily fixed or permanent in Dominica. Rather, *the problem* can cause the question of 'naming' to resurface throughout the reproductive life course of the child, without necessarily finding definitive resolution or consensus. And yet, despite the complex and uncertain parental politics of 'naming', there is often a shared impulse on the part of children, elders, and blood itself to reveal a 'true father'; to unambiguously place a child in relation to their father, his kin, and, thus, the wider social world. Moreover, this desire for blood to enunciate the truth of paternity through the naming of the father demonstrates the complex nexus of relations, interests, and events that transform tacit knowledge of sexual relations into the public acknowledgement of kin.

]p1[At this point, it is useful to bring the issue of blood's bodily speech into a broader analytic frame. Throughout, I have endeavoured to keep this essay theoretically close to the ground, retaining fidelity to the bodily theorizations of my interlocutors. However, it seems apt to reflect on what all of this says about Dominican bodily ontologies and the epistemologies that grow from them. Many of the reproductive subjects I have discussed arguably inhabit 'mindful bodies' (Scheper-Hughes & Locke 1987). Such bodies are knowable not simply through examination or intervention as Cartesian objects (of cognition and biomedicine), but also through affective awareness, their subjective materiality (Csordas 1990). But more than this, Dominican reproductive bodies are subtle transpersonal bodies with affects that extend sympathetically between kin, illustrated by 'de symptom' and encounters where 'blood flows/shivers/corresponds/speaks'. That said, such mindful transpersonal bodies can only be recognized as such by those who know how to read them, those with the bodily literacy to decode corresponding blood. Thus, the corporeal awareness of men who discern *la dormi*, women who 'sit and watch', and all who encourage mystical awareness amongst adult children can be interpreted as instantiations of Lévy-Bruhl's 'participation', an openness to the enchanted connection of beings, events, and persons within a social field (Greenwood 2009: 25). The Wailers song 'Who feels it knows it' speaks to the validity of such subtle participatory perception. Who hears, sees, and feels blood's elocution also knows their kin.

]p1[Contemporary Dominican men stand between the ritualized practice of their Amerindian forebears and a modern individuated experience of the *couvade's* affects. Their Creole bodily ontologies/epistemologies pose a challenge for anthropological theory, for they present neither the apparent radical otherness of an Amazonian father (who observes intricate food taboos to ensure the safety of his progeny) nor the ostensibly disenchanting corporeal ignorance of the American father (who discovers the truth of his paternity via a DNA test). Caribbean reproductive bodies disrupt the possibility of an ideal-type opposition of Western and non-Western bodily ontologies (Harris & Robb

2012: 668). Rather, Dominican reproductive subjects inhabit modern mindful bodies that improvise a shifting openness to enchanted readings of corporeal symptoms, appearances, and sensations. Such readings constitute a quotidian empiricism that draws as much on biomedical bodily concepts as Afro-Creole ones (infused with latent Amerindian understandings), and are posited in relation to the idea of an alienated Cartesian subject, a 'North Atlantic universal' (Trouillot 2002) that Caribbean subjects interchangeably relate to (by virtue of their modern, individualized colonial experience: Mintz 1965 – note the dismissal of 'de symptom' as 'mind over matter' above) and stand apart from (as we see with critical Dominican responses to the medical DNA test as a less reliable alternative to 'de symptom' or 'sit and watch'; or any oppositional Creole practice: Besson 1993; Wilson 1973). This case study of men's mindful participation in reproduction suggests a mode for approaching diverse and mutable bodily ontologies from the ground up (Harris & Robb 2012).

]p1[Whilst in no way guaranteeing active involvement in a child's life, the ways of reproductive bodily being I have discussed undoubtedly underscore the significance of physical paternity as a basis from which naming, support, and other substantive everyday relations can grow. Yet with the sense that such understandings are declining, the elder Kalinago man from the final vignette spoke of the need to continue cultivating this corporeal awareness and participation, which earlier generations of Dominicans employed to perceive paternity, and which I have documented the continuation of above. Arguing that once a man finishes having sex with a woman he should numinously know whether a child will be conceived or not, he emphasized:

]ex/[They must have de knowledge! Some men are so frivolous in dese matters dey don't take de observation! It do happen, I can tell you dat. I have de experience ... [It] is a natural thing, yeah is a mysterious thing! And people are not mindful of these things!]/ex[

Whether a father searching himself for ‘de symptom’, an elder female seeking resemblances on the body of a child, or the sensory experience of those who encounter their kin in later life, in each case blood speaks to those who know how to hear it, to those attentive enough to feel and comprehend its utterances, as it reveals hidden kinship realities.

#### [NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A Creole folk dance that emerged from the seventeenth century onwards amongst enslaved peoples in the French Antilles (see Rose 2009).

<sup>2</sup> As R.T. Smith (1988: 39) highlights, it is near impossible to cleanly delineate differences of kinship belief between Caribbean population segments (ethnicities and classes). Instead, he arrives at Drummond’s analysis of ‘cultural intersystems’ (1980), suggesting that Caribbean people use kinship idioms like they use language, flexibly shifting registers of expression. As such, I tease out some of the reproductive idioms at play within the Dominican intersystem.

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps an inheritance from Western antiquity, as Aristotle believed, ‘semen is the vehicle through which form is transmitted, the form of the father that is reproduced in his offspring’ (Sissa 1989: 133).

<sup>4</sup> Kalinago peoples, once known to ethnography as ‘the Island Carib’, are Dominica’s indigenous inhabitants. Their presence remains both in the visible features of ‘mixed’ Dominicans with ‘Carib hair’ and ‘fair’ complexions and those who identify as ‘pure Carib’, approximately 3,000 of whom reside in the isle’s northeastern Kalinago territory.

<sup>5</sup> Dominicans often speak of ‘spirit’ in terms of not only the soul but specific ‘ways’ and attitudes, which are heritable and stereotypically associated with people from a particular village or ancestral ‘line’/family.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Child-mother’ refers to the unwedded mother of a child, known also as a ‘baby-mother’ throughout the region or ‘baby-momma’ amongst some Black Americans.

<sup>7</sup> And interestingly, according to Cooper (2011) and King (2010), some infertile Caribbean men will knowingly accept a ‘jacket’ as a means of realizing paternity and hence perpetuating their name.

<sup>8</sup> As Leona, a popular Dominican calypsonian, laments in her 2014 song entitled ‘Baby Machine’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUAAnPDA6Noo>).

<sup>9</sup> ‘Couvade’ has old French Breton origins, meaning to ‘brood’ or ‘incubate’ (Laplant 1991). Dominica’s first European settlers were Breton Catholic missionaries and the kweyòl of the island features Breton words. *Couvade*, or *couver*, in Dominican kweyòl typically refers to the hen’s incubation of her eggs, but is not used in the context of paternal pregnancy symptoms.

<sup>10</sup> However, some who did not experience it had other spiritual and ‘mystic’ experiences that phenomenologically drew them into pregnancy. One father, for example, spoke of visions declaring the gender of his future child before any scan was taken and prophesised birthing complications which eventually came to pass.

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